

Patient Instructions: How to Manage Ear Drainage

When there is an opening in the ear drum from either an ear tube or a hole, called a perforation, your child may have drainage when there is an infection, called otorrhea. This drainage can be thin, watery, thick or look like mucous or pus. It may vary in color from clear to green or may even appear bloody. It can be quite copious and foul smelling. Think of the discharge as “an ear with a cold.” However, ear drainage is not harmful or dangerous to your child's ears or hearing, and most of the time this can be easily treated with topical antibiotics or ear drops. Sometimes your child may complain that the drainage is bothersome or feels uncomfortable, and this can be treated with over-the-counter pain relievers, such as Tylenol (acetaminophen) or Motrin (ibuprofen).

The most common cause for ear tube drainage is an ear infection similar to the ear problems that led to placement of the tubes. In this case the tube is in place, functioning correctly and doing its job to drain out the fluid causing the infection. The same can occur when there is an ear drum perforation (an opening in the ear drum).

Ear drainage is most commonly treated by the use of prescription ear drops and does not typically require the use of an oral antibiotic. In fact, a big advantage of placing ear tubes is that we can give the antibiotic drops directly into the ear rather than using oral antibiotics that may have other side-effects and be harmful to your child's normal gut bacteria. Unless specifically instructed by your ENT provider, the drops you should use when your child has ear drainage are:

CIPRODEX (ciprofloxacin-dexamethasone) or FLOXIN (ofloxacin) 0.3 % otic solution. Please do not use any over-the-counter drops as these may cause pain and may not properly treat the infection.

If you see any drainage or crusting around your child's ear(s), use the prescribed ear drops: 5 drops to the affected ear 2 times a day for 7 days (unless directed otherwise by your provider). Try to warm the ear drops to body temperature prior to placing them since the cold drops can cause discomfort. Clean the outside of the ear gently with a damp washcloth to remove any excess drainage or crusting before instilling the drops. Fill the canal with the medication and gently “pump” the small flap of skin in front of the ear a few times to help the drops get down the ear canal.

Here is a quick instruction link on how to properly instill ear drops:

<http://www.safemedication.com/safemed/MedicationTipsTools/HowtoAdminister/HowtoUseEarDropsProperly>

Whenever you are treating an ear infection with drops the ear should be kept dry. There should be no swimming or soaking in a tub until drainage has completely stopped.

When to call the office: If the drainage resolves with the drops, a routine follow-up visit (every 6-9 months to check the tubes) is all that is necessary. **If the discharge persists after 7 days of ear drop treatment or recurs within one month, please contact the triage nurse at 858-309-7706, Monday-Friday, 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m., except for holidays, to have your child seen sooner.**

For private insurance, there is a coupon code for CIPRODEX:

<https://www.ciprodex.com/patients/ciprodex-otic-ear-drop-savings>

If water precautions are recommended by the provider:

- Doc's Proplugs are found at surf or dive shops and have various sizes (<https://www.proplugs.com>). If these are not an option for your child, try Ear Putty, available at most pharmacies or online. (<https://www.macksearplugs.com/product-category/swimming-ear-plugs>).
- Custom-made molds are available through Rady Children's Speech and Hearing Department (858-966-8100) and need to be ordered by your ENT provider. Please note: These molds are NOT covered by insurance and require an appointment to make.
- Ear bands may be used to help keep the ear plugs in place. They are available at www.earbandit.com.
- Your ENT provider may also recommend Mack's ear dryer to dry the ear after swimming. <https://www.macksearplugs.com/product/ear-dryer/>